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## We'd Better Cache Culture On Far Side of the Moon

"RESOLVED, that there shall be a future!" is the debatable issue of world politics today. In the past few years we have seen a flood of writings on the importance of planning for the next century. But what are the odds that there will be a year 2000?

Dr. Leo Szilard used to remark that "an optimist is one who regards the future as uncertain," a definition that cheerily makes most of us optimists. It still takes some courage to deny the obvious implications of the contemporary scene.

Is there really much uncertainty about the outcome of global policies that seem calculated to ensure conflict, and then to maximize the level of force ultimately used in it? Has not Western society started the liberation of the underprivileged peoples of the world and then, having kindled their hopes with visions of technical panaceas, turned its back on their orderly development?

IN THE January issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, its editor, Dr. Eugene Rabinowitch, expressed the despair of many scientists by advancing the clock on the cover to seven minutes before midnight. This may be too gloomy. We have no way of measuring the odds. They may be even slightly better than 50-50 in favor of survival, no matter how depressing the world situation appears at the moment.

Besides, there is a technical approach to saving hope for mankind. The illusion of a posterity is one of the mainsprings of creative ef-

fort. Who would exert himself to publish a poem, exhibit a painting, report an experiment, draft a law or write a column if he seriously doubted posterity, some measure of awareness of his existence by future minds?

We have, in fact, stumbled on the ultimate motive for the exploration of space. For the past decade, I had thought that the scientific understanding of the solar system would be paramount. Man-in-space was a frivolous distraction, an expedient to attract public interest to an enterprise whose proper justifications were evidently too abstruse for general understanding. Astronautics could be labeled the purest form of escapism.

Now I have to concede the superiority of the collective wisdom. Escapism is the most realistic policy actually open to contemporary culture.

WE HAVE to steer clear of some technical misconceptions. Emigration via spacecraft is a dubious way to relieve population pressure on earth. The inhabitants who stay behind will always have more economical means to make room for one more. If they have found no other way to moderate their numbers, the most massive emigration imaginable will only briefly postpone the pressure.

The colonization of the moon and planets is, however, the most economical insurance we know how to buy for the perpetuation of human culture through the next century. In fact, we can already take some comfort in having created some minor planets—the Mariner spacecraft and their U.S.S.R. counterparts—whose continued orbit around the sun is almost invulnerable to the convulsions of Earth.

Existing plans for the exploration of space, with their mix of manned and instrumented flights, embody a sensible strategy for this kind of insurance. Perhaps there should be somewhat stronger emphasis on planting a microminiaturized li-

brary of the world's accumulated knowledge on the far side of the moon. This would cost less per page than it does to publish a book or send a telegram. Space flight could eventually be financed by private enterprise (marketing an inexpensive form of immortality), boosted by a contract for an archives for the Congressional Record.

OPTIMISTS as we are, we must still dedicate our main efforts to rescuing Earth from its global mess, which we can hardly do until we educate people toward a planetary perspective. Yet it would be foolhardy to take the survival of Earth, for granted, which compels us to press for extraterrestrial commerce. The very absurdity of this compulsion may, if we perceive it, help the educational process on which human survival depends.

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